

Business has silver lining

Mom 'n' pop firm is no piece of cake

By Jerry Johnston
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If you're one of the million people who've thought about starting a family business, the Johnson family of Park City have the "how to's" for you.

"Our jewelry business started out as something just to keep me busy," says Jill Johnson, "and it's developed into a full-time business for three of us."

Today, Tommy Knockers is one of the most respected Mom and Pop operations in Park City. And though Jill Johnson makes the family's success sound like a piece of cake, the truth is it's taken a lot of planning, dedication and hard, hard work.

Husband Stan, an architect, and son Clark took a class at the Kimball Arts Center about making jewelry so they could pitch in and help. Then the two of them began tinkering with silver themselves — literally.

"I saw the designs people were coming up with," says Stan, "and I said 'I can do that.' In my case, of course, that meant re-inventing the wheel."

Soon members of the Johnson family were falling into their roles and working 13 hours a day. Jill, who kept ahead of the trends by reading fashion and trade magazines, has al-



Tommy Knockers, in fact, wish they were doing exactly what she's doing.

"We do some craft fairs and arts festivals," says Stan. "Resort areas like this have their peaks and valleys and you have to adjust."

Adds Clark, "The nice thing is that I feel what I'm doing somehow makes a difference.

Jeweler Stan Johnson, front, architect-turned-silversmith, son Clark and wife Jill gather around the workbench at Tommy Knockers, the family's Park City business. What began as a part-time project for Mrs. Johnson has evolved into a full-time family business.

Spun Peanut Brittle

- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup light corn syrup
- 1 cup water
- 2 cups raw peanuts
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ cup butter or margarine
- 1 teaspoon soda

In heavy saucepan combine sugar, corn syrup and water. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until sugar is dissolved. Continue cooking until mixture reaches soft ball stage (236 degrees). Add peanuts and salt. Cook to just beyond soft crack stage (300 degrees). Remove from heat; add butter and

soda, stirring to blend. (Mixture will foam.) Pour onto 2 large, buttered baking sheets. Lift candy around edges with spatula and run spatula under candy to cool it partially and keep it from sticking. As soon as it begins to set, stretch out with forks and fingers to make it as thin as possible. (Since you need to work fast, it is helpful if there are two people working.) When cold, break carefully into pieces. Store in airtight containers or tightly closed plastic bags in freezer or cold place. Makes 2¼ pounds.

■ *From Mormon Country Cooking*

Maple Pumpkin Cookies

- ¾ cup shortening
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 cup cooked or canned pumpkin
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- ½ teaspoon lemon extract
- 2 cups flour, stirred and measured
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon ginger
- ½ cup shredded coconut
- ½ cup nuts, chopped

Maple Frosting:

- 2 tablespoons butter, softened

- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 tablespoons milk
- ½ teaspoon maple flavoring

In large mixing bowl, cream together shortening and sugar. Add egg, pumpkin, vanilla and lemon extract; beat well. Sift in dry ingredients; mix thoroughly. Fold in coconut and nuts. Drop onto greased cookie sheet by teaspoonsful. Bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes. When cooled, frost with Maple Frosting. Makes 3 dozen cookies.

For frosting, blend ingredients together until smooth and creamy.

■ *From Mormon Country Cooking*

Parfait Cookies

- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup brown sugar, packed
- ¾ cup butter or margarine
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons almond extract
- 3 cups flour, stirred and measured
- ½ teaspoon soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 oz. milk chocolate, broken into ½-inch chunks
- ¾ cup nuts, broken

sugars and butter. Beat in eggs and flavoring. Blend in 2 cups of the flour mixed with salt and soda. With wooden spoon add additional flour so that dough just barely ceases to be sticky, about 1 more cup. Stir in chocolate and nuts. Drop by heaping teaspoonsful onto greased baking sheet. Bake for 8-9 minutes or until done. Do not overbake. Cookies should have just a tinge of brown but mostly remain white, soft and high.

■ *From Mormon Country Cooking*

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In the end, Jill looks back at what happens almost as if it were fated. "The truth is I graduated from school in nursing. I opened a pre-school for awhile," she says. "But my father owned a business and my brothers are self-employed, so it was natural for me to end up here. Sometimes I think I'd just like to go in and take over some business and shape the place up."

If the business ended up in the good shape Tommy Knockers is in, no one could complain.

As for the future, the family would like to get a little marketing help. They might also expand the designs they have (Stan and Clark's silver jewelry that looks like "wrinkled fabric" is currently a regional rage). But for the most part, the objective is business as usual. Steadiness and a devotion to each other and to the job at hand.

"What's nice is we are able to play a little, too; go places just for fun," says Stan. "People can get stale, and when you get stale your health can be injured."

"The key," she says, "was I refused to sell something I really didn't believe in. We also thought having the designers of our jewelry right in the store to talk to people would help. And we decided not to expand things to the point we couldn't give personalized service. Also, I didn't want the typical jewelry store that had counters and things. I wanted something more intimate."

Today, Jill's friends constantly tell her how lucky she is to do what she does. ("They forget I didn't take a salary for 10 years," she laughs.) A good many people who visit